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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8573
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0232
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0254
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 1931
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0674
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0728
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCJ2/HSE/CCJ5// PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-2/REA/NMJIC-J2// PRIORITY
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0482
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1737

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000322

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN FM REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO THE "NEW PAGE"

REF: STATE 37801

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland f or reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On March 27, First Deputy Chairman and Foreign Minister Meredov touched on recent regional visitors, emphasized Turkmenistan's adherence to non-proliferation regimes and desire to work more closely with the OSCE, and signaled concrete interest in working with the UN on religious freedom and human rights. Though it's extremely early in Turkmenistan's opening to the world, Ashgabat does indeed seem to be moving in the right direction. An invitation from Washington for Meredov to visit, sooner rather than later, would likely receive serious consideration here. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Acting Charge called on First Deputy Chairman and Foreign Minister Rashit Meredov March 27. Meredov stated the Government of Turkmenistan values its growing relationship with the United States and has appreciated the recent steady stream of visitors, both high- and expert-level. A/Charge reaffirmed Washington's belief a page has turned in U.S.-Turkmenistani relations; we want to be helpful, and will work closely to cooperate. A primary goal of the new relationship is to support Turkmenistan's independence and sovereignty, not to provoke Ashgabat's other partners, including Russia. We believe sovereign countries have the fundamental right to make their own decisions. A/Charge noted that it would be very well-received in Washington and elsewhere if the Government of Turkmenistan would remove the exit-visa requirement for its citizens who want to travel abroad. Meredov took the point but made no immediate commitment.

¶3. (SBU) Meredov repeated his government's desire for U.S.-Turkmenistan relations to grow at all levels. He affirmed Turkmenistan's desire to work closely with the OSCE and was awaiting concrete details from OSCE for enhanced cooperation, especially assistance and training for elections. He expressed full openness to learn how other

countries conduct elections according to international standards. He also noted Ashgabat had invited the UN Special Rapporteur for freedom of religion to visit Turkmenistan this year, and expected a UNCHR visit in May.

FOLLOW-UP TO TURKMENISTAN-AZERBAIJAN PRESIDENTIAL TELCON

¶4. (SBU) Meredov reaffirmed that the March 13 telephone conversation between President Aliyev in Baku and President Berdimuhammedov in Ashgabat had been friendly and in the spirit of cooperation. He said no dates have been set for reciprocal presidential visits, but planning is under way through diplomatic channels. When asked if such visits might happen in the first half of this year, Meredov replied that presidential schedules can be difficult to coordinate but that his government is committed to making it happen.

GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN VISITS: CONSTRUCTIVE FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

¶5. (SBU) Meredov characterized the recent visits by Georgian Prime Minister Noghaidei and Kazak Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Izmukhambetov as working visits, but hastened to add they had been very constructive with real mutual understanding and agreement to work together more closely. When A/Charge teased Meredov for his overly cautious diplomatic language, Meredov laughed) but didn't elaborate on the contents of the visits not reported in the media. He did, however, reemphasize that they were "a beginning" and evidence of a mutual desire for enhanced regional cooperation.

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IRAN: DID PRESIDENT BERDIMUHAMMEDOV REALLY SAY THAT?

¶6. (C) A/Charge noted Washington had paid close attention to the March 16 visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Motaki to Ashgabat. He asked if Berdimuhammedov had really said, as reported by Iranian media, he strongly supports Iran's nuclear program and believes it is for peaceful purposes, or if journalists had exaggerated the president's views. A bit uncomfortable, Meredov commented journalists "always play with words," but he did not answer the question directly. Instead, he reaffirmed Turkmenistan's membership in and strict fulfillment of international non-proliferation agreements. He said, "We not only observe non-proliferation, we also practice it." He noted specifically Turkmenistan's participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative and said, "Anytime you give us actionable intelligence, we will act on it."

UNSCR 1747

¶7. (U) A/Charge delivered summary of demarche (ref) and urged the Government of Turkmenistan to report to the UN Sanctions Committee the steps they have taken to implement the resolution's provisions. He noted Embassy Ashgabat would deliver the full text of the demarche and a summary of its key provisions. Meredov replied that Turkmenistan fulfills its international obligations.

OTHER BUSINESS

¶8. (SBU) A/Charge previewed the upcoming CODEL Hoekstra. Meredov affirmed Ashgabat's full cooperation to make the visit successful. A/Charge also raised outstanding USAID visa issues, the need for a foreign ministry letter so the American Corner in Turkmenbashi can reopen, and a humanitarian travel case of a LES who needs medical attention in Moscow but is on the "no travel list." Meredov instructed America's Desk Director Serdar Bashimov to note these requests and said, "These issues will be resolved." (COMMENT: But he didn't say when. However, the following day, Bashimov affirmed to A/DCM he was working these problems, and, specifically, that the LES would likely be

able to travel to Moscow for her medical attention. END
COMMENT.)

19. (C) COMMENT: Meredov was relaxed and attentive throughout the meeting. Though not especially forthcoming on the substance of recent regional visitors, this was, after all, an initial courtesy call. Meredov made a special point to emphasize Turkmenistan's adherence to non-proliferation regimes, desire to work more closely with the OSCE, and upcoming UN visits on religious freedom and human rights. Though it's essentially only "five minutes past midnight," Ashgabat does indeed seem to be moving in the right direction. We believe an invitation from Washington for Meredov to visit, sooner rather than later, would receive serious consideration here. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND